

# ASIA: NZ RESEARCH

ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION • BUILDING NEW ZEALANDERS' KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF ASIA

## TRACKING STUDY SERIES of Asian Business Graduates

### REPORT 2

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*Please note that in some cases figures featured in the supporting graphs may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GWSP	Graduate Work Search Permit
INZ	Immigration New Zealand
ISM NZ	International Student Ministries of New Zealand
NZAID	The New Zealand Aid Programme within the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade that manages New Zealand's official development assistance programme and provides policy advice on international development issues (see: <a href="http://www.aid.govt.nz/about">http://www.aid.govt.nz/about</a> )
PR	Permanent residency: an immigration status that allows a person to live and work in New Zealand indefinitely and enjoy the same access to social services as a New Zealand citizen. Eligibility for PR is determined on the basis of an individual's 'points' (based on employment, education, age and other factors)
PRC	The People's Republic of China

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The research team would like to acknowledge the immense contribution of the Asian-born New Zealand-trained graduates who participated in this study. The giving of their time and interest to this research has been greatly appreciated and the invaluable information they have provided has enabled us to provide this report which reflects the qualities of these graduates at the outset of what appears will be significant careers.

In addition we wish to thank Cheng Hwang Lin and Lailing Suaalii who have in turn been our dedicated research administrators and Aaron Campbell who generously donated his time, enabled our online surveys to go online and allowed us to analyse information from them efficiently.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### IN AUGUST 2008, THE ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION

(Asia:NZ) commissioned International Student Ministries of New Zealand to begin a three-year longitudinal tracking study of Asia-born, New Zealand-trained business graduates. This three-year study (2008-2010) examines the role that Asia-born, New Zealand-trained business graduates play in the development of Asia-New Zealand business relationships. This second report examines the second phase of data collection. Despite considerable attrition since phase one, 76 graduates<sup>1</sup> remained in the study during phase two, yielding qualitatively rich data regarding their experiences and anticipated study-to-work transitions.

The report identifies and illustrates five post-graduation pathways. These were:

- degree-related employment in New Zealand;
- degree-related employment elsewhere;
- temporary, part-time or volunteer employment in New Zealand;
- temporary, part-time or volunteer employment elsewhere; and
- unemployment.

The report discusses factors graduates identified as facilitating or limiting their employment opportunities, then considers graduates' reflections on their New Zealand business qualifications, New Zealand immigration processes, and the maintenance of Asia-New Zealand connections.

### KEY PHASE TWO FINDINGS INCLUDES:

#### **HOW WELL WERE STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS REALISED POST-GRADUATION?**

There was diversity in experiences and perspectives. The extent to which graduates' expectations were realised was connected to their success in obtaining work that was relevant to their qualifications, meaningful and offered a "step" to future work. Graduates who had not found degree-related employment were the most frustrated and likely to express disappointment with their New Zealand business qualifications. Graduates highlighted the importance of substance behind a qualification 'brand' and of gaining work experience.

#### **WHAT ROLE DO RELATIONSHIPS PLAY IN GRADUATES' TRANSITION TO WORK?**

Graduates emphasised the importance of social networking and work experience for facilitating employment opportunities in competitive Asia and New Zealand job markets. Conversely, a lack of social connection was a key barrier to employment. Graduates described different kinds of relationships that had been helpful in facilitating successful study-to-work transitions, with families, friends, former lecturers, home-stay providers and work experience providers. While identifying family members as a source of support and sometimes employment, some graduates also noted the challenge of negotiating tensions between familial and personal aspirations.

#### **WHAT ROLE MIGHT GRADUATES PLAY IN DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING ASIA-NEW ZEALAND RELATIONSHIPS?**

Graduates identified eight ways in which they could contribute to Asia-New Zealand relationships. These were:

in Asia, through:

- providing New Zealand-related advice to businesses;
- sharing New Zealand expertise;
- promoting Asia-New Zealand business relationships at a policy level;

in a "bridging" capacity, through:

- providing advice to both Asia- and New Zealand-based companies on areas of potential conflict or cultural misunderstanding;
- working to promote understanding and exchange in educational contexts;
- developing New Zealand-Asia business (trade) relationships;

and in New Zealand, through:

- providing companies with Asia-related services; or
- providing Asian clients with accessible, culturally appropriate services.

<sup>1</sup> We have used the term 'graduates' to refer to the research participants in this study, although some were still students at the time of field-work and all were students during phase one.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF THE STUDY

Our central question focused on the role that Asia-born, New Zealand-trained business graduates play in the development of Asia-New Zealand business relationships. Phase two findings were promising in this regard. During phase three we will examine the graduates' ongoing roles in developing and maintaining Asia-New Zealand business relationships, which we will report on in 2011. We will also further examine: graduates' post-graduation pathways; the extent to which these meet their earlier expectations; and their perceptions of New Zealanders and New Zealand business qualifications.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### WE RECOMMEND:

#### Policy

That immigration policy reflect the likelihood that graduate employment pathways will be circuitous and unfold over time, for example through providing flexibility in relation to Graduate Work Search Permits and decisions on work visas and permanent residency (PR) applications.

#### Education

That business education providers:

1. recognise *all students* (i.e. domestic and international) as potential "international graduates", ensuring that course content reflects graduates' likely international careers;
2. provide prospective students with transparent information concerning their likely employment options and previous graduates' employment pathways;
3. foster work experience opportunities within their academic programmes and/or incorporate practices that connect senior students to supportive professional networks;
4. ensure early notification of failing international students and provide early remedial support or refuse re-enrolment in subsequent years;
5. ensure their career advisory services provide all students (including immigrant students) with in-depth and appropriate advice and support; and
6. take a proactive role in educating New Zealand businesses concerning the skills and opportunities associated with Asia-born, New Zealand-educated business graduates.

#### Business

That business organisations and the Department of Labour:

1. proactively assist by providing work experience programmes either with or in addition to education providers;
2. educate members concerning the strategic value of employing Asia-born, New Zealand-trained graduates; and
3. provide Asia-born business graduates with specific advice concerning the study-to-work/PR track.

## INTRODUCTION

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**IN AUGUST 2008, ASIA:NZ** commissioned International Student Ministries of New Zealand (ISM NZ) to commence a nationwide longitudinal study of the experiences of Asia-born, New Zealand-trained business graduates. Our aims were to:

- recruit students in the final phases of their courses when contemplating the step beyond graduation;
- follow new graduates through their post-academic transitions as they endeavoured to find employment and adjust to working in New Zealand or elsewhere; and
- examine the role that Asia-born business graduates played in developing and maintaining New Zealand-Asia relationships.

Specifically, we were interested in following graduates' post-graduation pathways in New Zealand, in their former "home" countries or elsewhere, including their transition to new employment, their retrospective reflections on studying in New Zealand, and their ongoing connections (if any) with New Zealand.

This second report of our three-year study provides the following:

- an update on our study methodology and research issues that have arisen to date;
- a discussion of phase two results in relation to our phase one findings;
- an outline of our intended direction for the final phase of the study; and
- preliminary recommendations.

There are four sections in this report. The first section contextualises the study's second phase, revisiting the aims and findings of phase one, and discussing the broader socio-economic climate shaping higher education, youth transition, employment and business on a national and global scale during 2009. The second section describes our study design and discusses issues that have arisen during the second phase of data collection. The third section examines our phase two research findings, and the final section discusses our research findings to date, outlining how we plan to proceed during phase three of the study and providing further preliminary recommendations for policy, education, business and business students.

## BACKGROUND CONTEXT

### REVISITING PHASE ONE

#### THIS REPORT SHOULD BE READ IN LIGHT OF OUR FIRST REPORT.<sup>2</sup>

That report provided a description of the New Zealand tertiary education sector as it relates to our study, an explanation of the language that we use in reporting on the study, and a brief history of Asian migration in New Zealand. In addition, our phase two findings (discussed in this report) address questions raised in the initial phase of the study.

Phase one of this study examined the perspectives of final-year Asia-born business students in relation to four key questions:

- why they chose to study business;
- why they chose to study in New Zealand;
- how they had experienced living and studying in New Zealand to date; and
- what their expectations were for the future.

Phase one students' stated reasons for choosing to study business fell into three main categories. Personal reasons included career-related aspirations and a personal interest in business as an area of study. Familial reasons included parents' employment or encouragement from family and friends. Educational reasons included prior secondary or tertiary education experiences.

Students' reasons for studying in New Zealand varied. For many students with New Zealand permanent residency (PR) or citizenship, studying in New Zealand was an obvious choice. Others described New Zealand as an attractive study destination owing to its English-language-based business courses; relative affordability; unique natural and human environment; and its difference as a study destination away from home.

Most students reported positive experiences in New Zealand but identified difficulty building relationships with locals. Students who reported positive relations with (other) New Zealanders emphasised that developing trust takes time, for example through volunteer work, involvement in student and community organisations, and employment.

Most phase one students post-graduation expectations centred on the desire to obtain a good- or well-paid job. About half of the students desired PR so they could live and work in New Zealand, at least initially. Graduates expressed a strong interest in maintaining links with New Zealand and with those they had met during their time of study. Some graduates spoke specifically about the possibility of engaging in future New Zealand-Asia business ventures.

Our initial report suggested the importance of:

- communicating with both students and their parents when marketing business as a subject area;
- ensuring that New Zealand remains an affordable study destination for Asia-born students;
- recognising the value of personal links and the power of recommendation in attracting students to New Zealand; and
- working to support students' career pathways through work placement opportunities and fostering strategic allies.

Questions that emerged from or remained unanswered in our phase one research findings informed phase two of the study. These were:

- how well are students' expectations realised post-graduation?;
- what is the role of existing relationships in graduates' ongoing transition to work?; and
- what role do graduates play in developing and maintaining New Zealand-Asia relationships?

<sup>2</sup> McGrath, T., Anderson, V., Ching, C. P., Doi, A., and Stock, P. (2009). *Tracking study of Asian business graduates: Report 1*. Wellington: Asia New Zealand Foundation. Available from: <http://www.asianz.org.nz/our-work/knowledge-research/research-reports/business-research>.

*“Asian students represent the strongest increase in domestic education enrolments across all qualification types in New Zealand.”*

## THE PHASE TWO CONTEXT

Phase two of the study occurred during a period marked by the 2008 global financial crisis and global economic uncertainty. The international implications of this crisis are still unfolding but, to date, have resulted in increased unemployment in many countries, including New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> Since the 2006 census, the New Zealand unemployment rate has almost doubled, a trend that is also reflected in unemployment rates for Asian New Zealanders.<sup>4</sup> Despite (or perhaps, due to) the global economic crisis, New Zealand is currently experiencing a strong upward trend in both international and domestic tertiary education enrolments. A 2010 Ministry of Education report identified a 9.2 percent increase in international student enrolments between 2008 and 2009 and suggested that higher youth unemployment in New Zealand might have contributed to a concurrent (6.3 percent) increase in tertiary education enrolments for domestic students aged 18 to 24 years.<sup>5</sup>

A recent Department of Labour report examines employment trends for Asian people in New Zealand and is helpful for contextualising our phase two study findings.<sup>6</sup> This report indicates that Asian people in New Zealand are youthful and highly skilled (reflecting current immigration policy) and overall are two times more likely than the national average to have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. In addition, Asian students represent the strongest increase in domestic education enrolments across all qualification types in New Zealand.<sup>7</sup> However, the report notes that in 2006, almost half of the Asian working-age population in New Zealand were employed in “semi-skilled/elementary occupations” and Asian working-age people with Bachelor’s degrees were three times more likely to be working as clerks than the national average.<sup>8</sup> The report authors conclude that “many Asians are over-qualified for the types of jobs they are employed in and may not be fully utilising their skills.”<sup>7</sup>

Further evidence to support this claim includes the over-representation of Asian people in New Zealand retail, service and sales sectors. The authors suggest that the reasons include employer discrimination, particularly against North Asian people<sup>9</sup> and the need for new migrants and young people to find entry-level jobs where “there are no obvious barriers in terms of qualification recognition, language and New Zealand work experience.”<sup>10</sup>

In this report we examine graduates’ current occupations, post-graduation pathways and ongoing experiences in relation to the phase two research questions (above). Although the report provides a descriptive overview of the graduates in this study, its primary focus is on the qualitative nature of graduates’ experiences in relation to their New Zealand business education, earlier and ongoing expectations, unfolding career pathways, and ongoing sense of connections with New Zealand and New Zealanders. In each of the “results” sections we provide overview information followed by more detailed case descriptions. Our aim is to illustrate the ways in which specific factors shaped graduates’ experiences and pathways in similar and different ways. Where possible, we draw links between phase one and phase two findings, but owing to phase one interview and survey panel attrition, we also include some new graduates who were not involved in phase one of the study.

3 Ferguson, N. (2009). The descent of finance. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(7-8), 44-53; Cai, F. and Chan, K. W. (2009). The global economic crisis and unemployment in China. *Eurasian Geography And Economics*, 50(5), 513-531; Cai, F., Wang, D. W., and Zhang, H. C. (2010). Employment effectiveness of China’s economic stimulus package. *China & World Economy*, 18(1), 33-46.

4 The 2006 unemployment rate for Asian people in New Zealand was 5.3 percent. By December 2009 this had increased to 9.2 percent. Notably, Asian unemployment in New Zealand in 2009 was higher than for European New Zealanders, although lower than for Pacific and Māori peoples. See Badkar, J. and Tuya, C. (2010). *The Asian workforce: A critical part of New Zealand’s current and future labour market*. Wellington: Department of Labour.

5 Wensvoort, M. (2010). *Tertiary education enrolments – 2009*. Wellington: Tertiary Sector Performance Analysis and Reporting, Strategy and System Performance, Ministry of Education.

6 Badkar and Tuya (2010).

7 Callister, P. and Newell, J. (2008). *Gender and tertiary education enrolments and completions: An overview of trends 1994-2006*. IPS Working Paper 08/05. Wellington: Institute of Policy Studies.

8 Badkar and Tuya (2010, p. 29).

9 See also: Department of Labour. (2009). *New faces, new futures: New Zealand – findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Survey: New Zealand (LisNZ) – wave one*. Wellington: Department of Labour.

10 Badkar and Tuya (2010) p. 25



## RESEARCH METHODS

**FOR THE FIRST PHASE OF THE STUDY** our primary methods of data collection were online surveys and in-depth interviews. Eligible participants included all Asia-born students in their final year of study at New Zealand business schools or in their first year after graduation. We recruited participants for phase one from late 2008 through to early 2009 through: participating business schools (by referral and through posters in Chinese and English publicising the study); ISM NZ staff and student clubs and networks; and peer referral. We invited all students to participate in both the survey and interview panel and five chose to participate in both. The initial online survey went live in March 2009. One hundred and thirty-one students and new graduates completed the first survey, exceeding our target number of 120. Interviews were conducted with a total of 40 people from October 2008 through to May 2009. An in-depth account of our phase one research methods and findings is available in our first report. Notably, both survey and interview panels continued to grow after we “closed” data collection to begin writing the report. By mid-2009, 171 students or new graduates had completed the initial online survey and we had conducted 50 face-to-face interviews. Later findings were not included in our initial report but by continuing to recruit participants we hoped to mitigate the effects of likely attrition over time.

After phase one of the study had been completed, we maintained contact with participants through newsletters updating them on the study’s progress and preliminary findings. We also provided all phase one participants with the link to our initial online report. In late 2009, we invited all phase one participants to participate in phase two of the study. We expected some attrition to occur in both panels as graduates moved from study to work and, in some cases, adjusted to living in new places or returning “home”. However, our interview panel remained relatively stable: 31 people were interviewed for phase two of the study, of whom 28 had also been phase one interviewees. A high level of attrition did occur in our survey panel despite the provision of incentives similar to those offered in phase one. To date, only 45 of the initial 131 participants have completed the second online survey.

We can only speculate on why our survey panel has experienced such high levels of attrition. A likely explanation is the length and complexity of the survey. Other possible explanations include participant-related factors such as: the stress of adjusting to a new phase of life, new employment and/or a new (or previous) living context; and a possible reluctance to discuss post-graduation disappointments or unmet expectations with “strangers”.<sup>11</sup>

11 Butcher, A. (2002). A grief observed: Grief experiences of East Asian students returning to their countries of origin, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 6(4), 354-368.

While the graduates we interviewed seemed to value the opportunity to discuss transition-related issues, difficulties and successes either face to face or by telephone, the impersonal nature of an online survey might have also made survey participation less attractive. However, survey panel recruitment is ongoing. We have recently increased participation incentives in an attempt to build up our survey panel again prior to the commencement of phase three.

The phase two survey and interviews were designed and carried out similarly to those described in our first report. They examined graduates’ current occupations, post-graduation careers and life pathways, ongoing connections with New Zealand and New Zealanders, retrospective or ongoing perspectives on New Zealand business qualifications, and graduates’ hopes for the future. Like the first phase, the phase two survey used a five-point Likert scale to elicit participants’ responses to a range of statements covering each area of interest, with spaces provided for further comments. Interviews were again semi-structured (based on a loose interview schedule), although many produced substantial interviewee “narratives” as interviewees recounted in-depth their post-graduation employment pathways or experiences between the first and second interviews. Key modifications were that:

1. during phase two our interview and survey data collection periods were more closely aligned; and
2. in analysing graduates’ post-graduation pathways we took a case based approach, as explained below.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, our second survey was considerably longer than the first, which (as discussed below), may have contributed to the high survey panel attrition rate.

Like our first report, this report provides information-rich data on Asia-born business students’ diverse post-graduation expectations, aspirations, reflections and pathways.<sup>13</sup> Due to the small size of our survey panel and the qualitative depth of both the survey panel comments and interviewee narratives, this report focuses largely on qualitative data, with descriptive statistics used to augment and contextualise this where appropriate. Unless stated, all descriptive statistics and qualitative data combine both interview and survey panel participants.

12 Stake, R. (2005). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications; Gill, S. (2010). The homecoming: An investigation into the effect that studying overseas had on Chinese postgraduates’ life and work on their return to China. *Compare*, 40(3), 359-376.

13 Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.

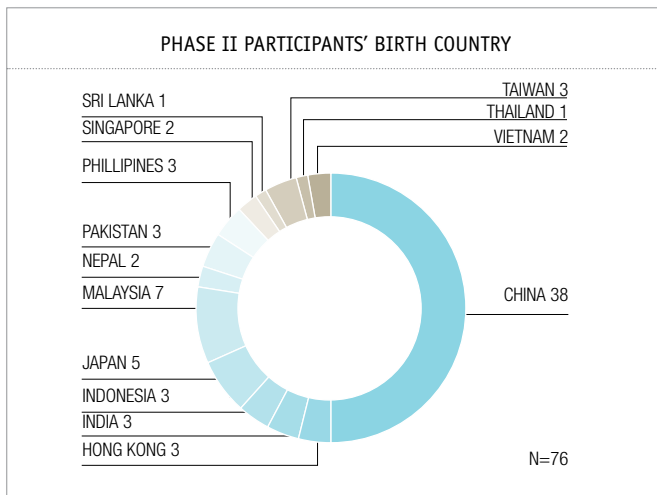
The report is structured as follows. We begin by providing a demographic overview of phase two graduates. We then outline five employment pathways that emerged in research interviews and illustrate each in relation to interviewees' in-depth narrative accounts. Next we identify factors participants perceived as assisting or hindering their efforts to gain employment and discuss graduates' reflections on their New Zealand degrees, immigration-related experiences (where applicable) and ongoing Asia-New Zealand connections. We conclude the report by discussing key phase two findings and our direction for the remainder of the study, suggesting some recommendations for policy, research and practice.

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

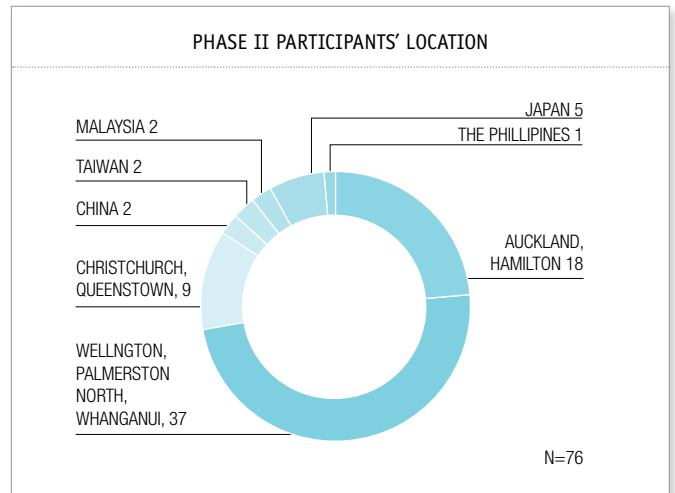
At the time of writing (2010) we had interviewed a total of 31 participants for phase two of the study and 45 participants had completed our online survey. As in phase one of the project, graduates represented all levels of tertiary study, from diploma to doctoral level. Graduates' countries of birth again broadly paralleled those evident in available statistics on Asian international graduates, with students born in the People's Republic of China (PRC) dominating in both survey and interview panels (Figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

Figure 1



During phase two of the study, graduates were mainly located in New Zealand, although five of the 31 interviewees and seven of the 45 survey panel members had returned to their birth countries (including Malaysia, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan and the PRC). No graduates were living outside New Zealand or their birth country. As in phase one, New Zealand-based graduates' were from all over New Zealand, although the majority were based in the North Island and most in the lower half of the North Island (Figure 2).

Figure 2



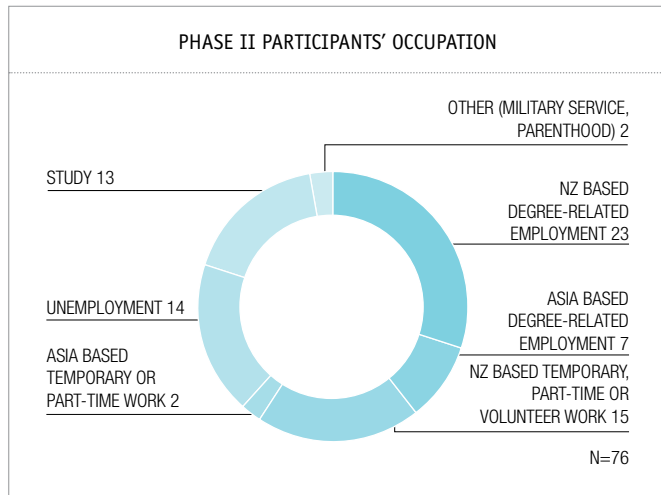
Notably, since most phase two participants were graduates (see below), their locations during the second data collection phase did not necessarily reflect the locations of their former business school.

In terms of phase two graduates' "occupations" during phase two of the study, 23 of the 31 interview panel members and 37 of the 45 survey panel members had completed their studies. Those who were still studying were mainly enrolled in post-graduate programmes, and some were also engaged in part-time, temporary or volunteer work alongside their studies. Twenty of the 31 interview panel graduates were working in some capacity when interviewed, ten in degree-related employment in New Zealand or elsewhere and nine in temporary, part-time or volunteer work in New Zealand or elsewhere. Three of the 31 phase two interviewees described themselves solely as "unemployed", although an additional interviewee who was working in a (degree-related) volunteer capacity increased the unemployed interviewees to four. Participants' phase two occupations are illustrated in Figure 3.

<sup>14</sup> The majority of international students identifying as 'Asian' in New Zealand tertiary education institutions are from the PRC, at just over 43 percent (see [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary\\_education/participation](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/participation)). It is impossible to comment on how the birth countries of our phase two participants reflect the birth countries of Asia-born business students generally, since no combined statistics on (New Zealand and international) business students' countries of birth are available.

*“Some graduates intimated that they had returned to further study owing to difficulty finding suitable work, so the number of ‘unemployed’ participants in the study could have been much higher than those represented here.”*

Figure 3



The distinction between each of the above occupations was not always clear cut. For example, one interviewee was employed in a management position that Immigration New Zealand (INZ) deemed to be unrelated to his business degree (in accounting). Other participants with post-graduate business qualifications had no difficulty getting work visas for positions for which they were arguably over-qualified (for example, office work or sales positions). We return to this issue in the discussion section. Also, some graduates intimated that they had returned to further study owing to difficulty finding suitable work, so the number of ‘unemployed’ participants in the study could have been much higher than those represented here. We have judged graduates’ occupations based on their self-definitions or (where different) INZ responses to visa or PR applications. Where students were studying, they were counted as such even if part time. Students with part-time employment or temporary or volunteer work were counted only as studying.

### FIVE POST-GRADUATION PATHWAYS

Variability was a marked characteristic of phase two interview accounts and survey responses. Graduates highlighted a broad range of factors as shaping their post-graduation pathways. We characterise these as:

- New Zealand-based degree-related employment;
- Asia-based degree-related employment;
- New Zealand-based temporary, part-time or volunteer work;
- Asia-based temporary or part-time work; and
- unemployment.

The extent to which graduates’ expectations were met after graduation, the role of existing relationships in graduates’ ongoing transitions to work, and graduates’ roles in developing and maintaining Asia-New Zealand links differed depending on their specific post-graduation experiences. The richest data in this regard came from interviewees’ narratives, where graduates reflected in depth on their previous expectations, post-graduation transition experiences, and ongoing hopes for the future. In this section, we illustrate each “pathway” using interviewees’ narratives, drawing connections where possible between interviewees’ first and second interview accounts.

### NEW ZEALAND-BASED DEGREE-RELATED EMPLOYMENT

Seven interviewees had gained employment in New Zealand that was clearly related to their tertiary qualifications and that exemplified the wide-ranging employment pathways open to business graduates. All were graduates of New Zealand universities who had obtained Bachelor-level degrees or higher. Mary,<sup>15</sup> Joy, Li Ling and Wen Bing were originally from the PRC, Patrick from Hong Kong, Mei Lan from Singapore and Derick from the Philippines. All held PR or New Zealand citizenship status. Mary was working as an assistant accountant in a large urban company, Joy in an administrative position, Li Ling as an accounting lecturer in a North Island university, Wen Bing in a sales and marketing position, Patrick as a software engineer, Mei Lan as a secondary school economics teacher, and Derick as an accountant.

With the exception of Derick, all interviewees with New Zealand-based degree-related employment spoke positively about their workplace environments. Wen Bing identified management practices in her company that proactively promoted cooperation and collegiality. Mary and Li Ling revealed how their perceptions of New Zealanders had shifted as an outcome of positive employment experiences. In her first interview, Li Ling had stated that it was difficult to find a suitable job in New Zealand “as an Asian” and indicated that she wanted to stay in New Zealand on a short-term basis only. In her second interview, she expressed a high level of job satisfaction and said: “Now I have totally changed my perspective. I like living and working in New Zealand”. During phase one, Mary had described encounters with both covert and overt discrimination in her part-time workplace and expressed a desire to move to a larger company after graduating. By the time of her phase two interview, Mary’s aspirations had been realised. She had obtained permanent employment in a larger urban company and described her post-graduation workplace as characterised by friendliness and a lack of discriminatory behaviour.

<sup>15</sup> All names are pseudonyms and bear no resemblance to actual interviewees’ names.

*“Mary and Patrick also suggested that prospects for developing Asia-New Zealand business connections might be limited in their current, “local” employment.”*

Derick was the only New Zealand-based graduate with degree-related employment who expressed caution in relation to his workplace environment. In his phase one interview he had described “white” New Zealanders as generally “less accommodating” than Asian people, saying, “It is hard to make friends with white people. I feel that there is a barrier that needs breaking”. In his second interview, Derick stated, “It’s better, but not way, way better”. He described a sense of progress (“I’m getting on better with my work-mates – a more professional relationship sort of friendship”) while admitting ongoing uncertainty about his “fit” within the workplace: “I’m not sure if I belong and I am uncertain of my workmates.”

Interviewees with New Zealand-based degree-related employment varied in their plans for the future. Most expressed contentment with their current work environments, although Derick discussed the possibility of returning to the Philippines at some stage. Patrick noted the limited prospects for upward mobility if employed in a small New Zealand company. Mary and Patrick also suggested that prospects for developing Asia- New Zealand business connections might be limited in their current, “local” employment.

#### **ASIA-BASED DEGREE-RELATED EMPLOYMENT**

Three phase two interviewees (Peter, Taiki and Miki) had obtained permanent, full-time employment outside New Zealand that was related to their New Zealand qualification. Peter (who had New Zealand PR and a double degree in business and law) and Taiki (a former international student with a business degree from a New Zealand private training establishment) had been part of the phase one interview panel. Both had won overseas positions before completing their studies. During phase two, Peter was working in Kuala Lumpur for a large multinational accounting firm in the area of international taxation. He described this position as meeting his expectations but acknowledged the challenge of adjusting to a new work-life balance, having shifted from study in New Zealand to employment in Malaysia. Taiki (who was still in New Zealand when interviewed) described the economic recession as having affected employment prospects for young people in Japan. Although he had hoped to gain work in Japan’s tourism industry, he had been unable to do so and had instead won a position in a Tokyo bank.

Like Taiki, Miki had gained employment in Tokyo (in a marketing and promotions company). Miki expressed a high level of satisfaction with her job, noting that it utilised both her media studies and business qualifications and provided “great opportunities to learn all aspects of business”. While Taiki expressed some trepidation about returning to family obligations

and social networks in Japan, Miki identified a ‘Think Home’ programme about re-entering her home country as very helpful in easing her transition between New Zealand and Japan.

When reflecting on graduate employability in Malaysia, Peter remarked that since few overseas-educated Malaysians return “home”, those who do so are highly prized for their local knowledge and overseas education: “like gold to the company”. He explained that because English is the “professional language” in Malaysian multinational companies, an overseas degree completed in the English language is more important than the degree itself. Echoing Peter, Miki indicated that her English-language proficiency and overseas experience were more helpful in gaining Japan-based employment than her New Zealand business degree.

#### **NEW ZEALAND-BASED TEMPORARY, PART-TIME OR VOLUNTEER WORK**

Seven phase two graduates who we interviewed were engaged in temporary, part-time or volunteer work in New Zealand. Their accounts were characterised by a sense of “waiting” and, in some cases, frustration. However, they also revealed participants’ creative responsiveness to mismatched career expectations and unanticipated or non-ideal work situations.

The extent to which participants saw their temporary, part-time or volunteer work as valuable depended on the extent to which they felt it:

- provided a pathway to more permanent employment;
- provided opportunities to utilise or add to their skills; and/or
- fitted their personal aspirations.

For example, John, a former international student from South India, was working as a hospice volunteer coordinator and database manager, a far cry from his phase one aspiration (to move to Japan and have a “fast paced lifestyle in high-level management”). However, John felt that his temporary work provided him with an opportunity to prove himself and to develop skills that “cannot be taught in the classroom”, including “taking responsibility for my actions, being enthusiastic, willing to get my hands dirty, and having good communication skills”.

Similarly, Mei Ling, a former international student from the PRC with a Master’s degree in human resource management, was working as a volunteer for the local Citizens’ Advice Bureau. Having stated during her first interview that it would likely be hard to get work in a field that is “dominated by Kiwis”, she valued the opportunity to develop her interviewing skills and gain knowledge of New Zealand social policies and legal regulations. Both John and Mei Ling remained optimistic about their job

*“The issue of pleasing parents and following personal choices is not an easy one.”*

prospects and identified local migrants’ work search programmes as helpful in moving towards permanent employment. In contrast, Zhen Wen, a former international student from the PRC, expressed a sense of frustration and disappointment. She had been unable to find work that used her degree-related skills, described her supermarket position as “temporary” and spoke less confidently about her future work prospects.

Julie, who worked part time for her husband’s business, exemplified how shifting lifestyle aspirations shaped work aspirations for some graduates. Having earlier hoped to gain a managerial position in the PRC, she now indicated that her priority was to be available to her two children, saying, “I... would be happy with a Pak ‘n’ Save<sup>16</sup> type of job to fit lifestyle... I am happy for some money but need time with the kids”. However, Julie alluded to a sense of tension between enjoying “quality of life” with her husband in New Zealand and meeting her parents’ expectations. She said, “My mum is not happy for me to obtain a part-time job... She told me that I am lazy.”

#### **ASIA-BASED TEMPORARY OR PART-TIME WORK**

Two graduates had obtained Asia-based work that was either part time or temporary. Like those in working in temporary or part-time positions in New Zealand, their work satisfaction differed depending on their personal aspirations. Kitoka, a former international student, had gained two “entry point” positions in the Japanese hospitality industry. She saw these as “stepping-stone” employment that could help her realise her earlier career aspirations. In contrast, Xiao Hua, a PRC-based former international student, commented on how hard it had been to gain employment back “home”. She reflected similar concerns to those expressed by New Zealand-based graduates in relation to the competitive employment environment and employers’ preferences for experienced employees. Having left work to care for ill and elderly grandparents, and abandoned post-graduate study plans in response to her parents’ wishes, she was now working for her father’s company. Like Julie (above), Xiao Hua grappled with the tension between her own and her parents’ aspirations. She admitted, “I want to escape from China, the stresses and difficulties... The issue of pleasing parents and following personal choices is not an easy one.”

<sup>16</sup> Pak ‘n’ Save is a supermarket chain in New Zealand that employs people in part-time positions and for varied hours.

#### **UNEMPLOYMENT**

Four graduates were unemployed at the time of their phase two interviews: Ron, Rachel, Mei Ling and Wei Xiong. All four were originally from the PRC and were former international students but by the time of their phase two interviews, all but Ron had obtained PR status. The interview accounts of these four graduates differed markedly. Mei Ling was happily engaged in volunteer work (see earlier), Rachel had “escaped” an exploitative and illegal employment position and was glad to be unemployed by choice. Ron and Wei Xiong had both failed several papers at university, and their phase one career expectations had been greatly modified in response to a repeated lack of job success (“I want a job quick as I can – any job... No pay is also acceptable”). However, while Ron spoke despairingly about a lack of employment (and volunteer work), Wei Xiong remained optimistic concerning his career future.

#### **GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT: ASSISTING FACTORS**

Four key factors emerged in phase two graduates’ accounts and survey comments as assisting with finding degree-related and meaningful employment:

- volunteer or other work experience;
- social connections;
- personal attributes; and
- job-search support or career guidance.

#### **VOLUNTEER OR OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE**

Thirteen of the phase two graduates who we interviewed described volunteer or other work experience as a factor likely to assist with gaining degree-related employment. The importance of work-related experience was also reflected in the survey responses, with 91 percent of graduates we surveyed agreeing or strongly agreeing that past work experience made it easier to obtain degree-related employment. These graduates described volunteer and other work experience as providing opportunities to prove oneself, gain experience, obtain references, gain confidence, become familiar with work environments, and feel fruitfully occupied even if unemployed. In addition, for some graduates, volunteer, part-time or temporary work experience had led to part-time, full-time and/or permanent employment. Kitoka suggested that the practical component of her New Zealand business qualification along with her English-language degree had likely made her an attractive candidate to her current employers in the Japanese hospitality industry. John reflected that having volunteered for his New Zealand employer, he was a “known quantity... they didn’t have to look for somebody [else] to take over from the previous [person]”. Wen Bing, another New Zealand-

*“Companies today are looking for confidence, social skills, decision-making skills and English skills”, said Patrick, a New Zealand-based graduate, “Having a degree is necessary but not sufficient.”*”

based graduate, was in permanent employment and stated that her “part-time job experience and degree” had together allowed her to obtain her current position. She explained:

*Some of my previous part-time jobs helped me to learn customer relations and to know how to connect with them. Talking to customers is often the breaking point for what they want and how to break the ice [with them].*

However, Wen Bing noted that management degree graduates may be at a disadvantage in terms of gaining degree-related work experience and employment: “As a fresh grad, you need work experience, which is hard to be given in management”.

Ron, who was unemployed at the time of his interview, revealed how volunteer work could offer other benefits besides employment pathways. Having indicated that he felt lonely and unmotivated owing to his lack of success in finding a job, he described how he worked voluntarily once a week with a former home-stay family, helping them to use the computer. Although Ron did not relate his work to future employment pathways, he stated that it gave him “a good feeling” and “something to do”.

### **SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

Ten of the phase two graduates we interviewed alluded to social or personal contacts as having helped them to find employment (whether temporary, permanent, part time or full time). Contacts included family members (who facilitated access to an existing family business), lecturers or professors (who provided references and offered career-related advice) and social contacts (who facilitated employment opportunities and offered advice). During phase two interviews, some graduates or prospective returnees highlighted the importance of social networks for gaining jobs in Asian countries. Zhen Wen worried that through living in New Zealand she may have jeopardised her chances of finding suitable employment in the PRC, alluding to the role of *guan-xi* or social networking as a basis for career opportunities:<sup>17</sup>

*To be able to do anything in China really depends a lot on relationships. While I have been away from there for a long time (since 2001), I have already lost time and chances in building friendships.*

Interestingly, Joy, a New Zealand-based, PRC-born graduate, suggested that social networks are also strategically important for job seekers in New Zealand, advising:

*Look for job recommendations. Have more skills than you think may be necessary... Be active job hunting or at work where your performance can be observed in temporary work or as a volunteer. Let people know you or your skills; even your personality. Know a lot of people.*

### **PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES**

Graduates highlighted various personal attributes as assisting with finding employment, which included a degree, employer references, personality factors, communication skills, English-language skills, confidence and effort. Graduates in the PRC, Japan and Malaysia highlighted the combined value of ‘local knowledge’ and an overseas degree from an English-speaking country. However, graduates differed in the emphasis they placed on their degrees as a factor facilitating employment. For example, while Peter (in Kuala Lumpur) described his New Zealand degree as having made a “huge contribution” to his success in finding work, Jane, a finishing Master’s student from the PRC, observed that in the PRC “work experience” and “holistic ability” are important in finding jobs.

The importance of ‘holistic ability’, or other attributes as well as a degree, was echoed by eight graduates we interviewed based in both New Zealand and Asia. For example Miki, a Japanese returnee, said, “Companies today are looking for confidence, social skills, decision-making skills and English skills”; and Patrick, a New Zealand-based graduate, “Having a degree is necessary but not sufficient. Other important factors that are helpful in one’s career prospects include good communication skills, the ability to learn fast and adaptability to change”.

### **JOB-SEARCH SUPPORT OR CAREER GUIDANCE**

Graduates we interviewed alluded to several employment-seeking programmes, including migrant internship and mentoring programmes, the “Student Job Search” service and university career services. Seven of these graduates indicated that their New Zealand educational institutions’ career services had been helpful in providing work-related advice or guidance.

<sup>17</sup> Gill (2010).

## GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT: PERCEIVED BARRIERS

Participants cited several barriers that they perceived as limiting their employment opportunities in New Zealand and in other countries. These were:

- lack of experience;
- being seen as “Asian” or “foreign” in New Zealand;
- the economic recession;
- lack of job-search support or career guidance; and
- “other”.

### LACK OF EXPERIENCE

Five graduates who we interviewed described “lack of experience” as a barrier to employment in New Zealand; and two, in the PRC. While almost half of these graduates highlighted volunteer or other work experience opportunities as helpful in obtaining employment, two of these graduates described having had difficulty finding volunteer work opportunities in New Zealand. One recalled being told “don’t bother” when she asked about volunteer opportunities, and another, “Don’t call us, we’ll call you”. A third graduate noted a lack of proactive support at an institutional level with finding internship opportunities likely to lead to work.

### BEING SEEN AS “ASIAN” OR “FOREIGN” IN NEW ZEALAND

The second most frequently cited perceived barrier to employment was being seen as “Asian” or “foreign” in the New Zealand context (five graduates). Mei Lan suggested that Asian people in New Zealand “need to have more than a local person” in order to be seen as employable. Another participant linked the “need to be more than a local person” with job market competition in the current economic climate: “Because of [the] recession, employers choose Kiwis first. I understand as I have no background and there is a barrier to communication”. However, graduates differed in their explanations for employers’ perceived preferences for non-Asian Kiwi employees. For example, Daisy (a PRC-born student) described it as “natural”: “Local employers prefer locals. It’s the reality and psychology of it... The situation can’t be changed because it’s natural”. Another graduate emphasised instead New Zealand’s broader migrant recruitment policy, which (he argued) reveals a superficial desire for engagement marked by discrimination and narrow economic self-interest: “New Zealand still has a bias against foreigners. It attracts foreigners to replace skill shortages not looking at the unique advantages of the new people coming”.

Notably, graduates who we surveyed emphasised “international-ness” as a more significant barrier to employment than inexperience. Almost 75 percent of these graduates agreed or strongly agreed that “employers in New Zealand are reluctant to hire international graduates”, while about half agreed or strongly agreed that “employers are reluctant to hire fresh graduates”.

### THE ECONOMIC RECESSION

Three of these interviewees cited the economic recession as a barrier to degree-related employment and one explicitly linked the recession with New Zealand employers’ apparent preference for “Kiwi” employees. Graduates we surveyed placed more emphasis on the economic recession as an employment barrier. Almost 60 percent of these graduates agreed or strongly agreed that “there are not enough jobs available due to the economic recession”; and almost 90 percent that “the job market is very competitive”.

### LACK OF JOB-SEARCH SUPPORT OR CAREER GUIDANCE

Five graduates described their educational institutions’ career or job-search support services as unhelpful owing to the limited time available for consultation, an apparent lack of personal interest on the part of careers staff, a lack of assistance with finding internship-type positions, and/or a lack of actual “job search” support. For example, one interviewee stated that he had been to career services but they “were busy so could not give me full attention”. Another said:

*[The] career centre guy tried to ask me bang bang questions to do with my CV but every time I could feel he was not patient; only 15 minutes appointment. No time taken to help. He wanted to finish his job but not to listen – useless because he was not interested in me.*

In addition, three graduates remarked that they found their educational institutions’ career expo to be of little help: one, because “most of the companies invited are the big companies and they are looking to recruit only those students with very good academic results”; and another, because he felt that “Chinese students” are disadvantaged in face-to-face networking situations as they are “foreigners” with “different accents and no PR”. Another expressed frustration at the ‘marketing’ emphasis of her educational institution’s career fair:

*Every year they organise a career fair that looks like help for students to find a job but it is more like advertising and it’s not that helpful. The career fair is superficial blah blah. The university or the department needs to sit down with us and give attention and time to us other than fluffy stuff. Wastes our time... graduate students are desperate for a career and need some real good help.*



*“My post-graduate degree is extremely theoretical-based and useful for research which I am interested about. However... in practical terms, I don’t think employers value post-graduate qualifications over experience in businesses.”*

**“OTHER”**

Other perceived barriers to employment included personal attributes or circumstances (loneliness, lack of motivation, desire to not move cities, family commitments); being over-qualified for beginning positions; time pressure (the need to maintain part-time employment in order to live while searching for degree-related work); and a lack of internship opportunities in New Zealand. One graduate described the sense of pressure she felt to find part-time work while also searching for more permanent degree-related employment owing to the limited duration of the one-year Graduate Work Search Permit (GWSP):

*It’s so frustrating but I can’t do anything about it. It feels like I’m sitting on a spiky carpet – I feel like I’m wasting my time. I have to find both a part-time and full-time job at the same time as I need part-time work to help me live.*

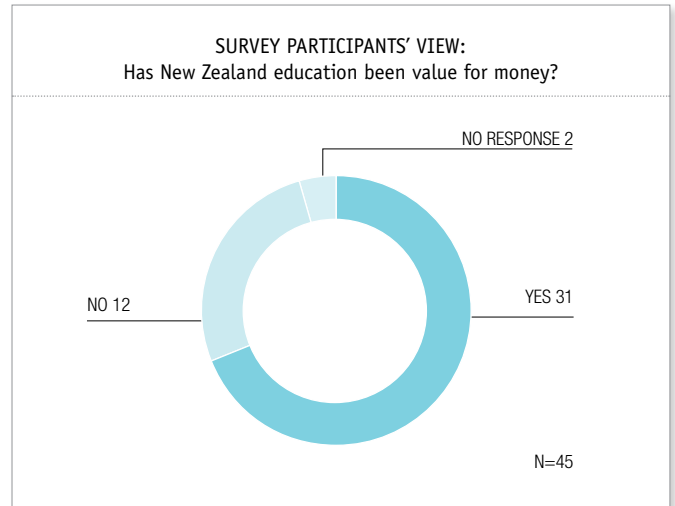
Two graduates who had returned to the PRC, commented on social connections as important for facilitating employment opportunities within the PRC and suggested that a lack of social connection could jeopardise graduates’ job prospects. One graduate alluded to gender as an employment-related issue in the PRC but drew a contrast between public and private sector positions: “In government or public sector, few women get the number one job, [but] in business, a woman’s capabilities shine through”.

**REFLECTIONS ON THE NEW ZEALAND BUSINESS DEGREE**

Phase two graduates and students revealed widely varying reflections on their New Zealand business qualifications. While the majority of these spoke positively about their New Zealand education, many qualified their responses.

Positively, most indicated that they felt their New Zealand business degrees had been “value for money” (Figure 4).

Figure 4



Further, of the 45 graduates we surveyed, 29 indicated that they perceived their qualifications either favourably or very favourably. The remaining 16 returned a neutral, unfavourable or very unfavourable response (Figure 5).

Figure 5



When asked to comment on why they rated their qualifications the way they did, surveyed graduates’ positive responses indicated a view of New Zealand business education as providing invaluable skills and attributes, such as: English-language confidence and proficiency; creativity; independence; and research, analysis, presentation and time-management skills.

*“New Zealand is a country that churns out thousands of graduates annually but fails to capitalise on this asset. Instead... thousands of these students leave. There is only a small retention rate.”*

For example:

*It makes me think differently in terms of business. I learn creativity in the current competitive market that is vital to gain competitive advantage over others.*

*It helped [me] develop a variety of skills: research skills, analysing skills, time-management skills, presentation skills etc.*

*[It] enabled me to develop individual capabilities to work independently.*

Surveyed graduates also spoke favourably of their New Zealand qualifications where they had matched their expectations and/or provided a pathway to employment, and/or when they recalled positive interactions with staff. For example:

*Studying English and business overseas was really interesting and valuable for me, and our college was helpful for overseas students.*

*It has... given me the knowledge and experience I wanted. The proficiency and experience of academic staff has been very good as well.*

*Having a business degree from New Zealand is one of the reasons I was hired for my job right now.*

Less favourable responses fell into three categories. The first was favourable but with an added qualification. For example:

*My post-graduate degree is extremely theoretical-based and useful for research which I am interested about. However... in practical terms, I don't think employers value post-graduate qualifications over experience in businesses.*

In most cases, less positive qualified responses referred to a perceived lack of practical emphasis in the graduates' New Zealand business programmes and/or a view that employers value experience over theoretical knowledge or qualifications.

The second type of unfavourable response reflected a disjuncture between graduates' expectations and experiences of post-graduation employment in New Zealand. For example, one graduate reiterated the lack of management opportunities for management degree graduates immediately after graduating:

*Personally, I think working experience is much more valued by employers. I obtained a masters degree in management last year, [but] so far I don't see any opportunity for me to get a management position anywhere in New Zealand.*

Two graduates remarked on the way in which New Zealand and its business education providers continue to market themselves to prospective students or “churn out” graduates despite many graduates having difficulty obtaining employment post-graduation. The first said:

*The degree and course does not even correspond to New Zealand's need. In fact, New Zealand has no market for such a degree, yet the university boasts highly about it.*

And the second:

*New Zealand is a country that churns out thousands of graduates annually but fails to capitalise on this asset. Instead... thousands of these students leave. There is only a small retention rate... Companies want experienced employees but are not willing to 'stick their necks out' to [employ] qualified graduates. Thus whether my degree is desirable/favourable should not be answered by me, but by the businesses here.*

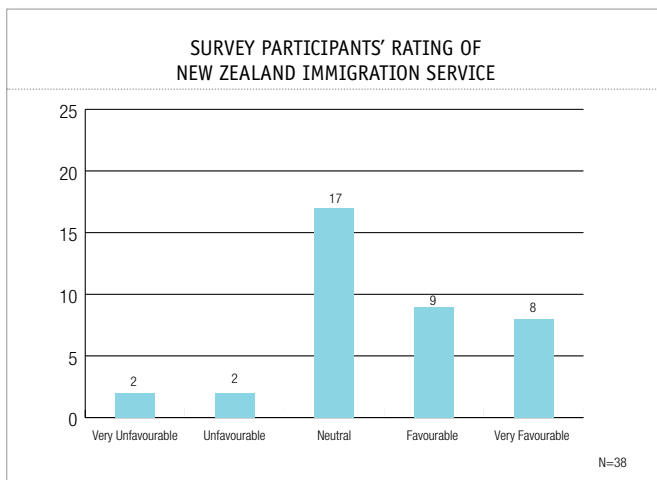
The third kind of neutral or unfavourable response was less common but reflected an apparent disjuncture between graduates' New Zealand study experiences and employment experiences in countries other than New Zealand. For example, one graduate we surveyed said, “I learnt a lot from uni but in some ways [what I learnt is] useless in my own country”. Another noted that his programme had emphasised business cases from the New Zealand, Australia and Pacific region, suggesting that a wider variety of cases might have been useful given that some graduates would work outside this region.

*“Immigration policy changes regularly. For example, a certain course you do may gain points in your application but six months later that course is not valid any more.”*

## REFLECTIONS ON IMMIGRATION-RELATED PROCESSES

Phase two graduates we surveyed were asked to rate the quality of immigration services that they had received while in New Zealand, using a scale from one to five (with one being ‘very poor’ and five being ‘very good’). Of the 38 who responded, 17 gave a favourable or very favourable rating, 17 gave a neutral rating, and four rated New Zealand’s immigration service negatively (Figure 6).

Figure 6



Of the 15 graduates we interviewed who spoke about New Zealand immigration processes: five described having had positive experiences; three neutral experiences; and seven negative experiences. Negative experiences were varied, and included difficulties with specific case officers, having to negotiate shifting “skill shortage” lists or PR requirements, having post-graduate employment perceived as not being degree related, and occasions when application processing took a long period of time.

In many cases, graduates’ comments about their experiences of immigration-related processes in New Zealand seemed to reflect their post-graduation employment pathways. For example, graduates who had found employment that INZ deemed to be degree related (and who were not already New Zealand permanent residents or citizens) tended to speak positively about their immigration-related experiences. For example, one said:

*The immigration service is excellent. I had a very positive experience with my student visa and permanent resident applications.*

And another:

*I had no issues getting a work visa. When I applied I got it three days later. PR was quite smooth; only three months. I used an agent so I paid a fee... my job matched exactly to what I studied.*

In contrast, graduates who had found work that INZ did not deem to be degree related, or who had studied with the intention of meeting specific PR requirements only to have these change while studying, spoke less positively and, sometimes, with considerable frustration. An example was Wei Bi, a graduate who had relinquished a good position with a multi-national business in Shanghai, completed a New Zealand business degree in accounting and was studying towards his Australian Public Accountancy qualification. Wei Bi stated that although he had found a logistics and management position with a large New Zealand supermarket company while on a GWSP, INZ had refused to grant him a work visa, as his current employment was not seen as related to his business (accounting) degree. As a result of his work visa application being declined, Wei Bi was considering returning to further study. He indicated that long term, he saw little point in staying in New Zealand and was considering looking for work in Australia.

Rachel was another graduate whose account highlighted the complexities of negotiating immigration processes in New Zealand. After graduating she had enlisted the help of an unscrupulous agent in order to find INZ-sanctioned (degree-related) employment and obtain PR. Her resulting employment situation had been exploitative and illegal and although she had successfully obtained PR she was unemployed by choice at the time of her phase two interview. Rachel noted the resulting difficulty for students when PR requirements shift after they have already embarked on a course of study:

*If the system makes a decision, it must allow the student taking a course to have consistency around regulations over the whole time and beyond... It is wrong to force students to deal with regulations that have changed from what they could have anticipated when starting a course.*

Similar comments were made by Mei Ling, who also had PR status and noted the regularity with which New Zealand immigration requirements change:

*It is not easy to immigrate to New Zealand because of its stringent policy. Immigration policy changes regularly. For example, a certain course you do may gain points in your application but six months later that course is not valid any more.*

A further difficulty with immigration processes was where students were from countries that had no New Zealand embassy or that were considered to be more of a security risk than others. For example, Ahmed, a male PhD student from Pakistan, commented on the complex process for obtaining a student visa owing, in his view, to the lack of a New Zealand-Pakistan embassy relationship.

He expressed frustration at needing to have his student visa renewed annually, and the associated difficulties with conference travel when visa processing sometimes took months. A second Pakistani PhD student (Mohammad) expressed frustration at the requirement that police certificates be renewed every year even when he had remained in New Zealand, noting that “the difficulty [involved] in getting such [certificates] is not recognised”. Mohammad commented on the inconsistent time taken to process visa applications, discussing the difficulties this can cause in terms of “normal family needs”. Giving his wife’s pregnancy as an example, he observed that the visa processing time of up to six months can make it “difficult to get a support person to come and help”. While Ahmed highlighted the importance of immigration processes taking normal student needs (such as conference travel) into account, Mohammad highlighted the importance of also considering “normal family needs... when a student visa policy is developed that involves families”.

Eight phase two graduates who we interviewed commented specifically on the recently introduced GWSP. All but one spoke positively about the extended work search opportunity afforded to graduates under the GWSP but three commented that they were uncertain whether a one-year work search visa is long enough. As one graduate noted, graduates need to have all documentation in place and the visa application ready early so as to be ready to look for jobs (and to accept them if offered) immediately following graduation. As she stated, “To run out student visa and apply for a GWSP at the last minute is the thinking of graduates trying to extend their time but employers want you to work straight away”. Another graduate commented that the timing of graduation for most students means that the GWSP is reduced to a maximum of 10 months’ duration.

## MAINTAINING ASIA-NEW ZEALAND CONNECTIONS

### BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

The phase two survey asked graduates to identify the ways in which their current positions could contribute to “the development of business relationships with an Asia-New Zealand aspect”. Of the 12 graduates who responded to this question, seven responded affirmatively. Answers were wide ranging and related to working in Asia-based businesses, New Zealand-based businesses, between both locations (in an advisory/consultative capacity) and external to business. Examples included:

1. providing New Zealand-related advice to Asia-based businesses (for example concerning the New Zealand regulatory environment or cultural aspects);
2. sharing New Zealand expertise with Asia-based businesses (for example expertise in benchmarking and logistics);
3. acting as a kind of business ‘translator’, or providing advice to both Asia- and New Zealand-based companies on areas of potential conflict or cultural misunderstanding (for example health and safety requirements);
4. providing Asia-related services to New Zealand-based companies (for example language services);
5. working to promote understanding and exchange in educational contexts (for example by: organising conferences, exhibits etc.; recruiting Asian students to New Zealand universities; and providing meaningful support to Asian students in New Zealand).

Five graduates surveyed indicated that, at present, they could not see themselves having a role in promoting Asia-New Zealand business relationships.

Just over half of the interview panel participants indicated that they were already involved in promoting some kind of link between Asia and New Zealand in a business or work-related capacity, or that they saw potential for promoting or being involved in developing such links. These graduates’ responses fell into the same categories as survey responses (above), with three additional categories.

“Over 80 percent indicated an intention regarding a current or future desire to maintain links with New Zealand and New Zealanders”

These were:

1. developing actual Asia-New Zealand business relationships (for example through the distribution of New Zealand-made kayaks in Malaysia, research examining marketing possibilities for New Zealand wines in the PRC, and exploring leather trade possibilities);
2. providing accessible, culturally appropriate services to Asian people in New Zealand in a business capacity; and
3. promoting Asia-New Zealand business relationships at a government or policy level.

In terms of promoting Asia-New Zealand business relationships at a government or policy level, Li Li highlighted the business connection possibilities when top New Zealand-educated graduates gain employment in Asia-based public service positions. As an NZAID scholar bonded to return to her provincial government job in the PRC post-graduation, she noted the likelihood that she would be promoted to a senior staff position upon her return. Li Li described her work as managing business macro planning, including establishing a close relationship between her province and the New Zealand dairy industry. Noting that “New Zealand wants to expand” its business relationships with the PRC, she commented:

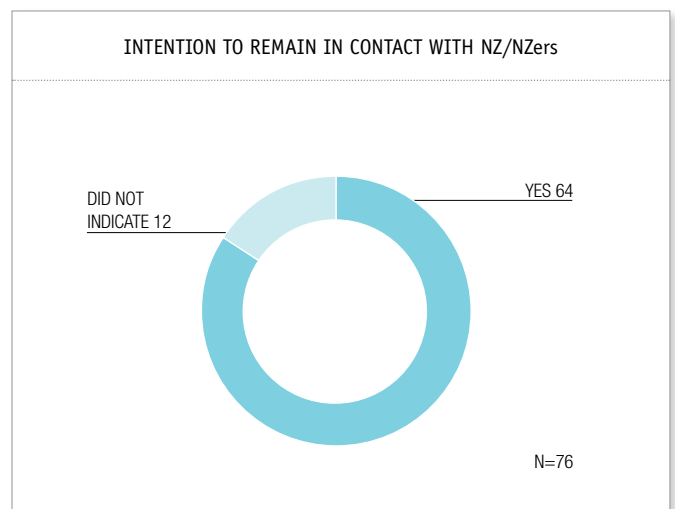
*My province has a front-line link with ASEAN by holding the China-ASEAN expo in [names city]... every year, and my workplace is located in [this] city. My province is now gaining importance as a pivot to link China cooperation with ASEAN countries...When I come back to China I will contribute synergy organisation around economic cooperation, ASEAN, my province, and New Zealand. This helps all round.*

Of the 16 interviewed graduates who stated that they could see potential for, or had already developed, business-related links between Asia and New Zealand, 11 spoke in terms of possibilities. This highlighted not only graduates’ openness to developing Asia-New Zealand business-related connections but also their knowledge and creativity in seeing where connections might be possible. New Zealand businesses would do well to recognise the multi-faceted social and professional networks, experiences, knowledge and skills of many Asia-born, New Zealand-educated business students and graduates and their potential as sources of advice and creativity in relation to “Asian market” expansion, developing new Asia-New Zealand business links, or serving Asian people more effectively in New Zealand.

**INTERPERSONAL CONNECTIONS**

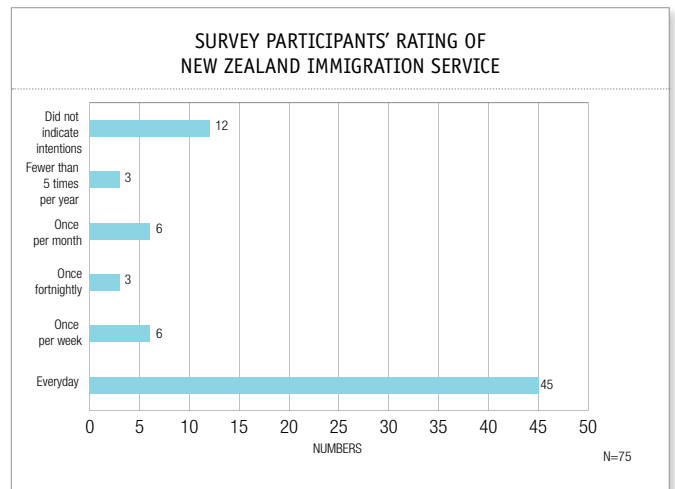
Almost all (41) of the 44 surveyed graduates indicated an intention to maintain contact with New Zealand or New Zealanders, with 36 stating that they had current and ongoing connections. When survey results were aggregated with interview results, 63 graduates (over 80 percent) indicated an intention regarding a current or future desire to maintain links with New Zealand and New Zealanders (Figure 7).

Figure 7



The survey asked graduates to indicate their intended frequency of contact with New Zealanders. Combined with similar indications from interview panel members, there was a strong intention for contact to be frequent and regular (Figure 8).

Figure 8



*“Sport is a way to build relationships, to cross cultures for business”.*

Comments in interviews alluded to different kinds of connection with New Zealanders, including close friendships, ongoing contact with lecturers, and connections explicitly as a basis for “business or trading”. Three surveyed graduates expressed a sense of gratitude towards New Zealanders:

*Many of my New Zealand friends have helped me through my years of study.*

*There are some lecturers and employers I have known very well and respect them. I really appreciate their help when I needed and they did not have to [provide it].*

*I believe it is respectful to remain in contact with lecturers especially after what they have done to get me where I am today.*

Many interviewed graduates connected their thoughts on actual or potential Asia-New Zealand business connections to interpersonal connections with New Zealanders or a sense of affinity with New Zealand. For example, Sharon, who described how she had been promoting New Zealand in Taiwanese educational contexts, explained her willingness to do so in the following way: “I feel more attached to New Zealanders. I am keen to link up with [them]. I feel I know them well – “hey bro, kia ora” feels good. I am half Kiwi... I plan to keep building relationships”.

Similarly, Zadili, a graduate with temporary employment, had co-founded a company to distribute New Zealand-made kayaks in Malaysia. Zadili described a sense of “chemistry” as a basis for business relationships and identified a shared interest in sport as providing a sense of connection when cultural understandings were otherwise at odds: “sporting is a way to build relationships, to cross cultures for business”. Li Li noted the importance of trust as a foundation for actual and potential business connections, and suggested a need to allay PRC public-sector employees’ suspicions as to New Zealand’s motives in recruiting top students to study on generous NZAID scholarships. Like the survey participants cited above, she expressed gratitude in terms of her own experiences in New Zealand and linked this to her business-related intentions:

*I am grateful to the New Zealand government for the opportunity to study, and my gratitude shows in recommending my future work. I will use that better understanding in policy suggestions around how to strengthen [the New Zealand-PRC] relationship.*

Notably, several interviewed graduates described their sense of connection to New Zealand and New Zealanders as having developed over time rather than instantly. The recent experience of a research team member suggests that long-term, sustained interpersonal connections may also be strategic in fostering Asia-New Zealand business relationships over time. Having been contacted by a former Asia-born, New Zealand-educated international student 10 years or so after the student returned to the PRC, he is now involved in brokering a significant agreement between New Zealand and PRC trade companies in conjunction with the former student.

On a cautionary note, Wei Bi suggested that negative experiences or a sense of disconnection might limit the possibility of Asia-born, New Zealand-educated business graduates contributing to New Zealand-Asia relationships of any sort. Having remarked that he saw little point staying in New Zealand “as a second class citizen”, he noted, “Chinese do have a choice”. In view of the more positive comments above, it seems reasonable to suggest that an Asia-born, New Zealand-educated business graduate’s sense of disappointment or disconnection with New Zealand and New Zealanders constitutes a lost opportunity both at a human level and from a business perspective.

#### **DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY**

This report presents the findings from phase two of a longitudinal research project tracking Asia-born business students from their final year of study through the two years immediately following graduation. Although our phase two findings remain preliminary, they nevertheless shed some light on the following questions:

- how well students’ expectations were realised post-graduation;
- what role existing relationships play in graduates’ ongoing transitions to work; and
- the role graduates (may) play in developing and maintaining New Zealand-Asia relationships.

The answers to these questions are best considered in relation to graduates’ employment pathways – whether they had: gained degree-related employment in New Zealand; gained degree-related employment elsewhere; gained temporary, part-time or volunteer work in New Zealand; gained temporary or part-time work elsewhere; or were currently unemployed.

## HOW WELL WERE STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS REALISED POST GRADUATION?

It is impossible to generalise about the extent to which Asia-born business graduates' expectations were met post-graduation. In phase one of the study we identified these expectations as marked by confidence (plans about where to live, preferred work options, and a sense of multiple possibilities) and uncertainty concerning the implications of the economic downturn, inexperience, and being Asian in the New Zealand employment context.

Phase one expectations also revealed a concern with family obligations as a factor in deciding where to live and work and as providing some constraint on personal choices. Graduates had indicated awareness that personal contacts would likely shape their future work possibilities and the extent to which they fostered or maintained links with New Zealand and New Zealanders.

The extent to which graduates' expectations had been met in the ensuing year seemed generally tied to their post-graduation pathways. With one exception, all the graduates we interviewed with degree-related employment spoke about their work with satisfaction, even if they acknowledged that their work had limited prospects for upward mobility, was an "entry level" position, or did not completely correspond to their long-term career aspirations. However, these graduates also acknowledged the challenges associated with transition, including the need to negotiate more complex realities than those they had imagined; tensions between their own and parental expectations; and modified work expectations or aspirations.

The perspectives of those in part-time, temporary or volunteer work were more mixed. Some were extremely positive about the opportunities their work offered them to make contact with people, gain experience and use their skills. Others saw their work as "stop-gapping" and of little value. Where graduates were looking to obtain a New Zealand work visa or PR status, they often spoke with frustration at the sense of limited opportunity, time pressure and the pressure to work for an income while searching for employment that met INZ approval. Some graduates without New Zealand PR or work visas were considering engaging in further study as an alternative to unemployment, unsatisfactory employment or a forced return "home".

Unemployed graduates' accounts revealed how unmet expectations in the absence of positive alternatives can have very negative consequences, including disappointment, depression and a loss of hope. While Mei Ling (an unemployed graduate with volunteer work) remained optimistic about her future, Ron (who had been unable to secure any work experience opportunities) described himself

as having no sense of future at all. Two of the four unemployed graduates (Ron and Wei Xiong) were international students who had failed papers that were part of their degree programmes. While no information is available concerning the extent of these students' academic failure, their accounts suggest a need for business schools to monitor international student progress carefully and ensure that they maintain rigorous entry criteria in order to avoid graduates' disappointment later, particularly given international students' fees.

Phase one graduates' expectations concerning the challenges and opportunities resulting from family and interpersonal connections were met in phase two. Graduates who returned "home" to Asian countries described family businesses as providing employment opportunities and family networks as providing encouragement and legitimacy, as well as a sense of obligation and constraint. Graduates in New Zealand and returnee graduates alike described social networks (in New Zealand and elsewhere) as providing opportunities to "prove oneself", access employment opportunities, develop collaborative business initiatives and gain advice.

Speaking retrospectively, many graduates expressed mixed feelings about their New Zealand business qualifications. While some spoke highly of their degrees' real or perceived value in New Zealand and elsewhere, others indicated that savvy marketing campaigns ring hollow when students find that marketing promises are unmet or unattainable after graduation. Some questioned the ethics of marketing a degree and actively recruiting students in areas where their post-graduation employment options are likely to be limited. Graduates' interview accounts and survey comments alike emphasised that in an international and highly competitive business world it is necessary to ensure that there is substance behind a qualification "brand".

Many graduates expressed an increased liking for New Zealand and New Zealanders. Although some participants suggested that New Zealand employers might discriminate against Asian people in their employment practices, others suggested that difficulty finding employment is common to many new graduates in a competitive global job market.

Some graduates who had earlier planned to leave New Zealand had modified their aspirations, and expressed enjoyment of the "Kiwi lifestyle" and a wish to remain in the country long term. Graduates noted that getting to know non-Asian New Zealanders can take time, opportunities to be together and some kind of "common ground" (whether work, faith, or leisure). Significantly, graduates who had enjoyed positive study experiences and positive interactions with (other) New Zealanders expressed a sense of gratitude and a desire to reciprocate by promoting New Zealand, and its educational opportunities and New Zealand business.

*“The potential of Asia-born business graduates to promote “good business” through their skills in bridging Asian and other New Zealand communities at a local level should not be disregarded.”*

### WHAT ROLE DO RELATIONSHIPS PLAY IN GRADUATES' TRANSITION TO WORK?

Graduates identified relationships as a key factor assisting them to find employment. They described different kinds of relationships, including with:

- lecturers (who provided advice or references);
- friends (who provided advice, suggestions and encouragement);
- family members (who owned businesses and could provide work opportunities, links to other business owners and/or economic support);
- actual or potential business collaborators or partners;
- agencies or educational institutions (that brokered internship, volunteering or mentoring opportunities); and
- prospective employers or community agencies willing to ‘take on’ a student or graduate on a provisional (internship or voluntary) basis.

Graduates described relationships as crucial to “doing business” in New Zealand and in other countries, for example noting the importance of social networking or *guan-xi* in the PRC, and allowing one to become a “known quantity” in the New Zealand employment context.

Phase two findings suggest that business schools would do well to facilitate supportive professional connections for senior students proactively, for example through internship or volunteer work opportunities, mentoring programmes or work experience placements. In addition, graduates suggested the importance of promoting students’ development as people, not just as academics, since communicative ability, adaptability, flexibility and excellent social skills are highly prized by employers worldwide.

### WHAT ROLE MIGHT GRADUATES PLAY IN DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING NEW ZEALAND-ASIA RELATIONSHIPS?

Phase two findings were both encouraging and cautionary in terms of Asia-born business graduates’ potential for developing and maintaining New Zealand-Asia relationships. Graduates who envisaged themselves as playing a role in this regard highlighted multiple ways in which they could do so in an Asia-based capacity, a “bridging” capacity and a New Zealand-based capacity. These are summarised below (Table 1).

Table 1

#### POSSIBILITIES GRADUATES IDENTIFIED FOR FOSTERING ASIA-NEW ZEALAND RELATIONSHIPS

In Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing New Zealand-related advice to businesses</li> <li>• sharing New Zealand expertise</li> <li>• promoting Asia-New Zealand business relationships at policy or government level</li> </ul>
In a ‘bridging’ capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing advice to both Asia- and New Zealand-based companies on areas of potential conflict or cultural misunderstanding</li> <li>• working to promote understanding and exchange in educational contexts</li> <li>• developing Asia-New Zealand business (trade) relationships</li> </ul>
In New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing companies with Asia-related services</li> <li>• providing Asian clients with accessible, culturally appropriate services</li> </ul>

Although in some cases graduates had already developed Asia-New Zealand business links, or were already working to promote New Zealand in Asia-based contexts, most spoke in terms of possibilities. The extent to which their ideas become reality will partly depend on New Zealand employers’ willingness to engage with Asia-born business graduates, and graduates’ success in securing jobs where employers are open to the development of Asia-New Zealand links.

In a cautionary sense, graduates who saw no role for themselves in developing such links often described their workplaces as “local” in focus. This may signal a lack of awareness on the part of some New Zealand businesses that engagement with Asia is not solely a matter of international business or external trade relations. Asian New Zealanders are a fast-growing minority grouping and New Zealand is an increasingly multilingual and multicultural. The potential of Asia-born business graduates to promote “good business” through their skills in bridging Asian and other New Zealand communities at a local level should not be disregarded .



*“From an immigration perspective, relying too heavily on rigid definitions of work (as degree related or not) may be inappropriate for new graduates.”*

### THE PROBLEM OF CATEGORISING EMPLOYMENT

A final note is necessary in relation to employment and categorisation. Data analysis during phase two of the study highlighted the inadequacy and danger of defining different kinds of graduate employment too rigidly. For example, for some graduates, employment that could be defined as “semi-skilled or elementary”<sup>18</sup> provided an entry-level position and an important step towards so-called skilled employment. Similarly, graduates did not always refer to self- or part-time employment in terms of a lack of job-market success or in terms of employment barriers.<sup>19</sup> For some graduates, such types of employment were desirable owing to their employment preferences, personal interests or priorities (for example, a wish to be look after young children). Further, some graduates’ accounts revealed the anomalies associated with tight (or arbitrary?) definitions of degree-related work. For example, Wei Bi was forced to give up a full-time, high-level position which INZ deemed unrelated to his degree, while some graduates were granted work visas for clerical-type positions. Mei Ling was doing voluntary work (officially ‘unemployed’), but her work was clearly degree related and valuable to her Citizens’ Advice Bureau clients.

Attempts to rank and define different kinds of employment (as skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, degree-related etc.) may reveal more about perceptions and values than the extent to which particular employment contexts offer opportunities for people to grow and contribute to society. This phase of our study revealed the ways in which different kinds of work can have very different meanings and implications for different people. From an immigration perspective, relying too heavily on rigid definitions of work (as degree related or not) may be inappropriate for new graduates. Many graduates (including those born in New Zealand) take entry-level or positions that are slightly tangential positions to their qualifications as stepping stones to reach their degree-related aspirations. Given the broad content of many business qualifications, it is difficult to decide for them and for officials to determine which work is degree related and which is not. Further, as many phase two graduates emphasised, degrees are about not just a particular content area or discipline, but also the development of generic skills (for example, the ability to communicate well, think critically, be flexible and evaluate evidence). In this sense, many jobs are degree related that might not fall within tight disciplinary parameters. Rachel’s account provides an important caution. Tight definitions of (desirable) degree-related work without careful employer/agent monitoring and graduate education may lead some graduates to accept inadequate employment and increase their vulnerability to unscrupulous employers and immigration agents.

<sup>18</sup> Badkar and Tuya (2010), p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

### CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF THE STUDY

The central question that this study addresses concerns the role that Asia-born, New Zealand-trained business graduates play in the development of Asia-New Zealand business relationships. Our phase two study findings were promising in this regard, highlighting eight ways in which graduates could contribute to Asia-New Zealand business relationships, whether based in Asia or in New Zealand, or by working in a “bridging” capacity. Notably, most graduates spoke in terms of potentialities and possibilities.

During phase three of the study we will examine the continuing development of participants’ links with New Zealand and roles in terms of Asia-New Zealand business relationships. In addition, we will continue to examine:

- graduates’ employment pathways;
- the extent to which these meet their earlier expectations; and
- their perceptions of New Zealanders and New Zealand business qualifications.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**BASED ON OUR PHASE TWO STUDY FINDINGS**, we suggest the following recommendations for stakeholders in policy, business and education in New Zealand.

### IMMIGRATION POLICY

Immigration policy should reflect the likelihood that graduate employment pathways will be circuitous and unfold over time. This requires some flexibility in relation to GWSPs and decisions around work visas and PR applications. Specifically, we recommend:

- the length of GWSP visas must allow for processing time, “shut-down” periods (for example, the Christmas/New Year period), and graduates’ dual need to look for temporary and permanent work. While graduates appreciated the time this visa allows for them to look for work, some suggested it be extended to be comparable with other countries that compete with New Zealand for skilled labour (for example Australia, where the visa is for 18 months);
- the use of explicit criteria in judging visa applications must be balanced against the necessity of case-based flexibility and attention to applicants’ broader circumstances. We suggest that case officers be made aware of the special circumstances of graduate visa applicants, namely that many have enormous potential and a high level of education but a lack of work-related experience (or in the case of some graduates, New Zealand experience). Immigration policy and practice should ideally recognise graduates’ broader skills (not just those related to discipline-related content knowledge) and their likely need to find entry-level, stepping-stone or tangential employment in order to gain experience for higher-level positions. (Management graduates are a specific example);
- that case officers be educated concerning the broader skills fostered through academic qualifications. This will ensure their ability to assess entry-level jobs better in order to achieve the intention of the policy behind the GWSP scheme, namely the recruitment of New Zealand-trained graduates;
- INZ should provide education and/or a simple guide to New Zealand employers as to their part in ensuring that suitable international graduates are granted visas allowing them to work in New Zealand businesses;
- INZ or the Department of Labour could offer annual on-campus “information days” for Asia-born and other international students to educate them concerning: job market processes, opportunities and issues; possible study-to-work pathways; New Zealand immigration requirements; and legal/illegal employment practices; transparent information concerning

timeframes should be available to all visa applicants and attention should be given to ensuring that stated timeframes are met;

- a careful balance between set criteria and flexibility may be particularly important for visa applicants from countries where special visa requirements apply. INZ should undertake consultation as to the most efficient and suitable way of determining students’ level of “security risk” Long and unnecessary delays in visa processing cause students considerable stress and expense and potentially jeopardise their ability to meet scholarship provision deadlines and inflexible academic timeframes;
- that INZ and other policy-makers concerned with immigration and employment explore further how to take a “pathway” approach to visa provision, including how they might work with suitable New Zealand-educated graduates (and their employers) as they negotiate the immigration processes required for residence in and long-term commitment to New Zealand; and
- one option could be to offer graduates visas allowing them to gain work experience in their broad areas of training. This might provide graduates with opportunities to ‘prove themselves’ to prospective employers, particularly during periods of high unemployment and economic instability. This could be similar to a student visa and be administered as a kind of training course or study-to-work bridging programme.

### EDUCATION

Our main recommendation for business education providers is that they provide work experience opportunities within their academic programmes and/or incorporate practices that connect senior students to supportive professional networks. Examples could include:

- incorporating greater levels of industry-related experience into business courses, especially in the latter stages;
- providing for more internships (during summer periods and following course completion);
- exploring internship opportunities with small businesses;
- providing work placement opportunities as part of academic programmes;
- developing mentoring programmes where senior or post-graduate students are linked with business owners or experienced employees; and
- incorporating programme components that require students to communicate with local business owners and/or employees as part of their course work.

**FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:**

- business schools should recognise all students as potential “international graduates”, where possible ensuring that course content reflects the likelihood that graduates will work in many parts of the world;<sup>20</sup>
- take a proactive role in educating New Zealand businesses concerning the skills and opportunities that Asia-born, New Zealand-educated business graduates bring to New Zealand businesses;
- business schools need to improve their career advisory services beyond providing CV advice and linking the best graduates with large, high-profile companies. Those working in tertiary education career advice services require in-depth ongoing training on diversity issues and current labour-market trends. Specifically, they require an in-depth understanding of: the possible barriers faced by immigrant graduates; the unique skills that multi-lingual, multi-cultural graduates can bring to the New Zealand business sector; and immigration requirements for international graduates. Career advisers could also play a role in facilitating internship, volunteer and work experience opportunities or linking graduates to other relevant career support agencies and programmes;
- business schools should provide prospective students with comprehensive and transparent information concerning their likely employment options and previous graduates’ employment pathways. This is especially important for international students, for whom studying in New Zealand is a considerable financial investment; and
- business schools providers should ensure that international student progress is monitored and failing students are flagged early in their degree. Students flagged as failing should be provided with early remedial support or refused re-enrolment in subsequent years. Allowing students to graduate with “useless” degrees does nothing for the image of New Zealand qualifications worldwide, or for the graduates concerned.

**BUSINESS**

Business organisations and associations need to provide:

- education for members concerning the strategic value of including Asia-born, New Zealand-trained graduates in their workforces;
- education for members regarding their part in handling immigration matters; and
- internship or work experience opportunities for Asia-born students in order to allow skilled graduates to: “prove themselves”; gain relevant experience; and facilitate links between New Zealand businesses, Asian community networks and Asian business networks in New Zealand and Asia.

The Department of Labour and business organisations need to:

- proactively assist in providing work experience programmes either in partnership with or addition to education providers;
- work with small businesses and business schools to assist in the provision of internship opportunities; and
- educate potential employers on the opportunities afforded by a more diverse workforce and their role in handling attendant immigration matters.

Immigration consultants and/or their professional associations need to provide Asia-born business graduates with specific advice concerning the study-to-work/PR track and business employment opportunities in New Zealand.

<sup>20</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of this idea, albeit from a geography perspective, see: Haigh, M. J. (2002). Internationalisation of the Curriculum: designing inclusive education for a small world. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 26(1), 49-66.

## AUTHOR PROFILES

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